PROJECT LENS

RESOURCE GUIDE 02 OF 06

Prompting Guide

See AI clearly.

Think clearly in an AI-powered world.

L	Learn	Understand AI.
E	Evaluate	Question and verify.
N	Navigate	Know when and how to use it.
S	Secure	Protect yourself and others.

Version 1.5 · Updated October 27, 2026

01

What a prompt is

A **prompt** is what you type (or say) to an AI chatbot. Clear prompts get useful answers. Careful prompts keep you safe.

These tips work with **any** AI chatbot, including ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Claude, Meta AI, and the assistants built into phones and apps. The buttons and names look different, but they all respond to prompts the same basic way.

Two rules sit above everything else in this guide:

1. **Protect your private information.** What you type may be stored by the company.
2. **You are the decision-maker.** AI can help you think. It should not decide for you.

02

Security first: 7 safe-prompting rules

Follow these every time, in every chatbot. A good answer is never worth giving away your private information.

1. **Use the real app or website.** Download only from the official app store or type the company's web address yourself. Fake "AI" apps and sites exist to steal information and money.
2. **Leave out anything that identifies you.** No Social Security, Medicare, bank, or card numbers. No passwords or PINs. No full name with your address or birth date.
3. **Remove names before you paste or upload.** Before sharing a letter, bill, or medical form, cover or delete names, account numbers, and addresses. Better yet, describe it in your own words.
4. **Don't share other people's private details.** Your family's health, money, or contact information is theirs to protect.
5. **The chatbot will never need your password.** If a chat, pop-up, or "AI helper" asks you to log in, verify your account, or pay, stop. Close it.
6. **Don't click links or call numbers AI gives you** for banks, agencies, or tech support. Find them yourself on your card, statement, or the official website.
7. **Check your privacy settings.** Most chatbots let you turn off chat history or stop your chats from being used to train the AI. Look for "Settings," then "Privacy" or "Data controls." Ask someone you trust to help you find it.

Remember: treat every chat like a postcard. Write only what you'd be comfortable with a stranger reading.

03

The recipe: START, IMPROVE, CHECK

Good prompting is a short conversation, not one perfect question.

1. **START.** Ask a clear question. *"What is the best time to plant hyacinth bulbs?"*
2. **IMPROVE.** Add details to get a better answer. *"I live in the Pacific Northwest. Answer like a master gardener, keep it short, and ask me questions if you need more information. Please link your sources."*
3. **CHECK.** Check the answer. Are the sources real, reputable, and up to date? Does the answer make sense?

What to add when you IMPROVE

Ingredient	What it does	Example words
The task	Says exactly what you want	"Write," "explain," "list," "compare," "summarize"
Background	Gives context, without private details	"I'm new to smartphones." "I live in Oregon."
A role	Shapes the answer's point of view	"Act as a patient computer teacher."
Do and don't	Sets clear rules	"Do use simple words. Don't use technical terms."
Format	Makes the answer easy to read	"Use 5 numbered steps." "Keep it under 100 words."
An example	Shows what good looks like	"Here's a note I liked. Write one in this style."
Ask me first	Lets AI fill gaps by asking you	"Ask me any questions before you answer."

You don't need every ingredient every time. Two or three usually make a big difference.

04

Before and after

Each better prompt is clearer and safer. Notice what was added, and what was taken out.

Weak or unsafe prompt	Better, safer prompt	What changed
"Phone help"	"I have an iPhone. Give me 5 simple steps to make the text bigger. Use plain words."	Task, device, format
"Write a birthday message for my granddaughter Emma Lee, born 3/14/2011, at 22 Oak St, Bend."	"Help me write a warm birthday card for my granddaughter turning 15. She loves soccer and art. Keep it short; I'll add my own touch."	Removed full name, birth date, address
"Is this a scam? [pastes email with account number]"	"I got an email saying my bank account is locked and I must click a link today. What are the warning signs of a scam like this?"	Described it instead of pasting private info
"What should I do about my medicine?"	"Explain in plain words what 'take with food' usually means on a prescription label. I'll confirm with my pharmacist."	General question; expert has final say
"Make a meal plan"	"Act as a friendly nutrition coach. Suggest 3 easy, low-salt dinners for one person. Don't include fish. List ingredients first."	Role, do and don't, format
"Tell me about Medicare"	"Explain the difference between Medicare Part A and Part B in 4 short bullet points. Include a link to the official Medicare website so I can check."	Specific task, format, asks for a source

05

Helpful phrases to copy

These work in any chatbot. Type them as a follow-up after the first answer.

To make it easier to understand

- "Explain that more simply, like you're talking to a friend."
- "Use shorter sentences and no technical words."
- "Give me one step at a time. Wait for me to say 'next.'"

To get a better answer

- "Ask me questions first if you need more information."
- "Give me 3 options and the pros and cons of each."
- "That's not quite right. I meant ___. Please try again."

To check the answer

- "Where did you get this information? Please share links."
- "How sure are you? What might you be wrong about?"
- "What would a professional want me to double-check?"
- "Is this information current? When was it last true?"

To start fresh

- Open a **new chat** when you change topics. Old details can confuse the answer.

06

Security warning signs

Stop and close the chat or app if you see any of these.

Warning sign	Why it matters	What to do
The "AI" asks for your password, account number, or Social Security number	Real chatbots don't need it to answer questions	Close it. Don't type anything else.
An AI app asks you to pay, subscribe, or enter a card right away	Many fake "AI" apps are subscription traps	Check reviews and the developer name in the official app store
A pop-up says "AI detected a virus, call this number"	A classic tech support scam	Close the browser. Never call the number.
AI gives you a phone number or link for your bank, Medicare, or a company	AI can make up numbers, and scam sites can trick AI	Get the number from your card, bill, or official site
A website or document tells the AI to do something, and the AI suddenly asks you for information or to click something	Hidden instructions in web pages or files can hijack AI tools	Stop. Start a new chat. Don't follow the request.
A chatbot on a social media ad or in a text message offers "free" help	Often a front for phishing	Only use AI tools you opened yourself
You're asked to "connect" AI to your email, bank, or accounts	That gives the tool deep access to your life	Only do this with help from someone you trust
A newer AI tool offers to act for you, like booking or buying	These tools can spend money or send messages in your name	Set it up only with someone you trust, and never with your bank or email password

Uploading files and photos: only upload something if you'd be fine with a stranger seeing it. Cover names, numbers, and faces of others first.

07

Practice prompts to try

Try these in any chatbot. None of them needs private information. Tick each one off as you go.

- [ ] **Learn your phone:** "I have a [type of phone]. Show me, step by step, how to block a phone number. Use simple words."
- [ ] **Spot a scam:** "What are the 5 most common scams targeting older adults right now, and the warning signs for each?"
- [ ] **Plan a day:** "Act as a local guide. Suggest a relaxing half-day outing in Portland, Oregon for someone who prefers short walks. Ask me questions first."
- [ ] **Understand a word:** "What does 'two-factor authentication' mean? Explain it with an everyday example."
- [ ] **Write a note:** "Help me write a short thank-you note to a neighbor who shoveled my driveway. Keep it warm and simple."
- [ ] **Check the AI:** Ask a question you already know the answer to. Did it get it right? Then ask, "Where did you get that?"
- [ ] **Compare chatbots:** Ask two different chatbots the same question. Do the answers match? If not, which one gave sources?

08

Prompt cheat sheet

Print and keep next to your computer or tablet.

Project LENS Prompt Cheat Sheet (works with any chatbot)

Before you start: Can I do this without AI? Should I use AI for this?

START: Ask a clear question.

IMPROVE: Add the task, background, a role ("Act as..."), do's and don'ts, and the format you want.

CHECK: Ask for sources. Check them. Confirm big things with a real expert.

Never type: Social Security, Medicare, bank or card numbers, passwords, PINs, or your full name with your address or birth date

Never trust from AI: Phone numbers, links, or "urgent" instructions. Find them yourself.

Stop if: The AI asks for a password, payment, or to "verify your account"

Magic phrases: "Explain more simply." "Ask me questions first." "Where did you get that?"

Scam help in Oregon: Oregon DOJ 1-877-877-9392 · National Elder Fraud Hotline 1-833-372-8311

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Version 1.5 · Updated October 27, 2026 · Next review April 2027